**What is the American Dream?**

**Adapted by Suzanne Conti from http://online.sfsu/~kferenz/syllabus/dreams/**

The term was first used by James Truslow Adams in his book the *Epic of America* which was written in 1931. He states:

"The American Dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position." (p.214-215)

In the United States’ [Declaration of Independence](http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trt001.html)our founding fathers :

"…held certain truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

Might this sentiment be considered the foundation of the American Dream?

Some things to consider:

[Were homesteaders who left the big cities of the east to find happiness and their piece of home in the unknown wilderness pursuing these inalienable Rights?](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=rbpe&fileName=rbpe13/rbpe134/13401300/rbpe13401300page.db&recNum=0)

Were the [immigrants who came to the United States](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/papr:@filreq(@field(NUMBER+@band(lcmp002+m2a10987))+@field(COLLID+newyork))) looking for their bit of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, their Dream?

And what did the desire of the [veteran of World War II](http://www.nbm.org/Exhibits/WWII.html) - to settle down, to have [a home](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/i?ammem/horyd:@field(NUMBER+@band(thc+5a49405)):displayType=1:m856sd=thc:m856sf=5a49405), a car and [a family](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/i?ammem/bbpix:@field(NUMBER+@band(ppmsc+00046)):displayType=1:m856sd=ppmsc:m856sf=00046) - tell us about this evolving Dream?

Is the American Dream attainable by all Americans? Would [Martin Luther King](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/) feel his Dream was attained?

Did [Malcolm X](http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/065.html) realize his Dream?

Some say, that the American Dream has become the pursuit of material prosperity - that people work more hours to get bigger cars, fancier homes the fruits of prosperity for their families - but have less time to enjoy their prosperity. Others say that the [American Dream is beyond the grasp of the working poor](http://www.startribune.com/stonline/html/special/leaky/hage07.htm) who must work two jobs to insure their family’s survival. Yet others look toward a new American Dream with less focus on financial gain and more emphasis on [living a simple, fulfilling life](http://www.newdream.org/).

[Thomas Wolfe](http://www.libertynet.org/%7Efirst/ndd/readings/wolfe.html) said, "…to every man, regardless of his birth, his shining, golden opportunity ….the right to live, to work, to be himself, and to become whatever thing his manhood and his vision can combine to make him."

**Is this your American Dream?** Refer to the “American Dream” PowerPoint presented in class/examples/links/ideas……

**Referring to the questions on the previous slide, create and present a group and individual interpretation of the “American Dream” to the class….**

1. **Assemble into a group of 3-5 members. Each member will choose one DIFFERENT venue below (listed under “Specifics”) to express the group and each members’ individual “American Dream”.**
2. **Define the group “American Dream” in a few sentences and write this as a mission statement for your presentation. Each member should also have their unique “American Dream” described in a few sentences.**
3. **Choose a venue (photographer, poet, producer, comedian, or musician) and find ways to relate your vision of the “American Dream” to the class. You may create a photostory, animoto, podcast, or blog site for the venue of choice. Your group will then create a group project, incorporating each venue into one group PowerPoint presentation to be shared with the class (see below for the rubric and detailed instruction sheet for more specific details).**
4. **Present your group and individual interpretation of the “American Dream” to the class.**

**SPECIFICS**

1. **Photographer—Capture the images of the “American Dream”. Show the “American Dream” and how it has been affected by time, cultural influences, and significant historical events. Specify how your choices relate to both group and individual goals on achieving the “American Dream”.**
2. **Poet—Seek out and capture the heart and soul of the “American Dream”. Find samples of at least 3 poems that show how the “American Dream” has been affected by time, cultural influences, and significant historical events. The actual poems, authors, and years the poems were written must be included, as well as your synopsis and analysis of the poems meanings. Specify how your choices relate to both group and individual goals on achieving the “American Dream”.**
3. **Producer—Show the story of the “American Dream” through stories, films, scripts for movies, etc… Find samples of at least 3 films/movies that impacted the evolution or trials/tribulations of the “American Dream”. Who were the actors, producers, and directors? What was the setting and time period? What years were they made? Also include your synopsis/analysis of how those films/movies depicts/depicted the “American Dream”. Specify how your choices relate to both group and individual goals on achieving the “American Dream”.**
4. **Comedian—Find irony in the “American Dream”. Find at least 3 comic scripts or political cartoons/videos that express irony or the humorous side of the “American Dream”. Include the authors of the pieces, publications they appeared in (newspapers, magazines, websites, like jibjab.com) and the year they were published. Also include how the cartoons/videos depicts/depicted the “American Dream”. Specify how your choices relate to both group and individual goals on achieving the “American Dream”.**
5. **Musician—Find and play the music of the “American Dream”. Find at least 3 pieces of music (any genre) that characterizes the “American Dream”. Include the artists and years of production. Download and import the music to be shared with the class, as well as how the music depicts/depicted the “American Dream”. Specify how your choices relate to both group and individual goals on achieving the “American Dream”.**

**Finally, each of the above individual venues should be presented in photostory, animoto, podcast, or any APPROVED medium, and then uploaded for presentation in a group PowerPoint or Flipchart (submitted to edmodo.com) to be shared with the class. See the rubric for individual/group grading.**

**GROUP PRESENTATION (PowerPoint or Flipchart):**

**Slide 1—Group members and Title**

**Slide 2—Group Mission Statement on the “American Dream”**

**Slides 3-?—Individual venue presentations (uploaded photostory, podcasts, blogs, animoto).**

**Slide ?—Affirmation of group “American Dream” analysis**

**Last slide—Individual dreams/explanations as to how those dreams can become a reality.**